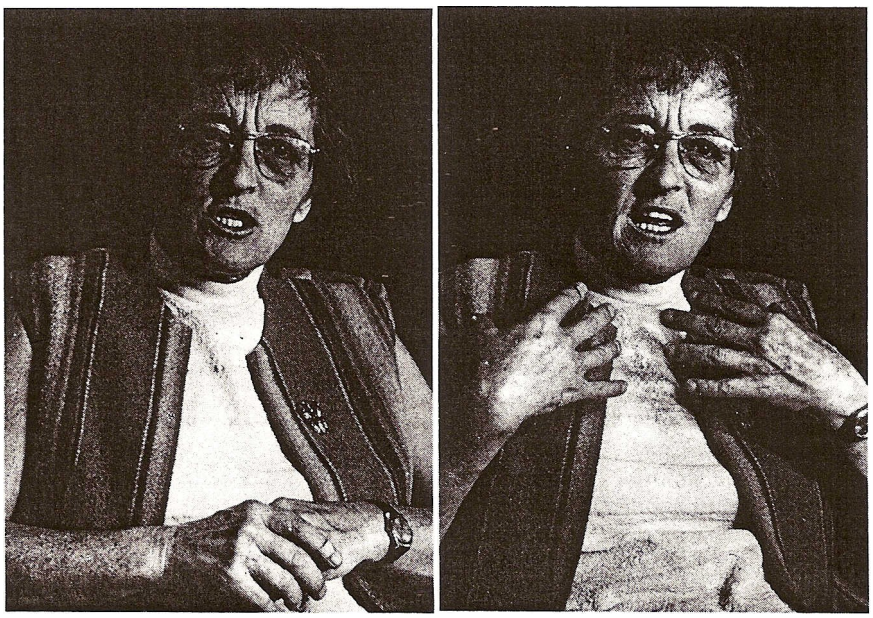
ELISABETH KUBLER-ROSS

PLAYBOY INTERVIEW: *a candid conversation with the renowned expert on death and dying whose beliefs in afterlife and spirits led her to an unlikely guru and the taint of scandal*

As Masters and Johnson have changed the world--shaking up our mythology about human sexuality, launching sex into the modern age--so has Elisabeth Kubler-Ross altered the consciousness of the world in her area of work: death and dying. Before this Swiss-born physician and psychiatrist began lecturing all over the globe, working with thousands of terminally ill patients and writing (her 1969 book, "On Death and Dying," is the classic study in this field), the topic of death was, in our Western culture, the ultimate taboo. Doctors, nurses and medical personnel, well trained in the science of life but lacking in the capacity to deal with death, frequently could not tell patients the truth, could not listen to them, ignored their emotional needs and truly abandoned them. Families, too, were ill-equipped to handle a loved one's impending death. So terminal patients were left to face the last, most profound act of their lives in a nightmare of loneliness and pretense.

Kubler-Ross has transformed all that; she has revolutionized the care of the dying, to allow us to perceive death and the process of dying from a more enlightened and humane point of view. For the past 12 *years, she has traveled more than 250,000 miles a year, lecturing to health professionals and laymen, visiting dying patients, spreading her credo that "dying can be one of the most beautiful, incredible experiences of life if it is shared with loved ones," conducting five-day workshops called Life, Death and Transition for the terminally ill and their families. People who have heard Kubler-Ross speak are generally moved to weep; thousands consider her a saint.*

The medical establishment is not so sure. Although she is applauded for her Pioneering work--including her identification of the five stages of facing death--her recent journey into mysticism has raised eyebrows among her conservative peers. Through her work with people who had been resuscitated from clinical death--primarily accident and heart-attack victims whose vital signs had ceased temporarily--she discovered a similarity of near-death experience that proved to her the existence of a happy afterlife. With this work, she began to head down a spiritual path, away from her strict scientific orientation. In the past few years, her lectures have described her own out-of-body experiences and her relationships with spirit guides who materialize before her and do such things as sing "You Are My Sunshine" into her tape recorder. Although last year Kubler-Ross was named one of the 11 Women of the Decade for the Seventies by readers of the Ladies' Home Journal, *she is considered a highly controversial figure.*



"I'm still an uptight, logical, square Swiss doctor, a hillbilly, and until a few years ago, I didn't believe in ghosts. But I've had some experiences, personally, that have

"It would be the greatest tragedy to do away with cancer. Visualize what it would be like: Every house would be full of paralyzed, incontinent old people. All illness

"In the headlines, I have lost my marbles, I've had venereal disease, I don't respond to pleas of dying patients and my workshops are sex orgies. They say that about my

PHOTOGRAPHY BY LARRY L. LOGAN

Born in a small town in Switzerland 54 years ago, she was one of a set of triplets, in what she terms a "straight and square" upper-middle-class family. Her father was authoritarian and wanted Elisabeth to go into the family business. But she was always a rebel. So, at the age of 18, as World War Two was ending, she took off for war-torn Poland with a rucksack and two dollars. She slept on the ground, learned primitive emergency medicine, delivered babies, worked as a cook, a mason and a roofer while setting up typhoid and first-aid clinics for the thousands of homeless streaming through Europe. In those years, she discovered the mission to help devastated people that would propel her for the rest of her life.

She returned to Switzerland for her formal medical training and spent every summer doing relief work throughout central Europe. She married Emanuel Ross, a young neuropathologist, and reluctantly came to America, where they did their internships and residencies and began raising a family. Her real desire was to be a "country doctor" and live in Africa or India, but circumstances pushed her into psychiatry and work with chronic schizophrenic patients at state hospitals. "It was an incredible challenge," she says, and her thrust was to, motivate them to have pride, dignity and responsibility. Later, she did the same thing in Chicago, taking time from 'her schedule at the University of Chicago Medical School to work with blind and retarded children.

Because of this tiny, determined woman, America is finally beginning to view death as the mass of the world always has—an inevitable piece of the process of life itself. There are now 125,000 courses in death and dying taught in medical and nursing schools; and the hospice movement-where the ill can live out their final days in a loving, non-hospital environment—has flourished.

But in the fall of 1979, *a scandal involving Kubler-Ross swept through the national press. She was living in the mountains of Escondido, California, outside San Diego, separated from her husband and children and closely connected with a couple named Jay and Martha "Marti" Barham, "healers" and "spritualists." In private sessions held at the Barhams' ranch, a cult of followers gathered regularly to materialize spirit guides into human form. Barham was ostensibly the "channel," or medium, used. When group members began smelling transcendental rats, they defected in large numbers, speaking of odd sexual activities involving the "spirits" and the guests. The San Diego district attorney's office entered the scene to investigate the story of a ten-year-old child sexually abused by a spirit entity who may or may not have been Barham in disguise. The press followed quickly and what ordinarily would have been just another California booga-booga tale became —because of the revered Kubler-Ross's involvement—national headlines. Although most investigators have viewed her as a naive victim, Kubler-Ross's reputation and credibility have been gravely undermined.*

To explore this fascinating woman's work, the scandal and her extraordinary life, PLAYBOY *sent journalist* Marcia Seligson *to her home in Escondido. Seligson reports:*

"About six months before the assignment, a friend had taken me to hear Elisabeth lecture at a church in Los Angeles. The room was packed, and within five minutes, this diminutive, tired-looking woman, with a heavy Germanic accent and a first appearance of extreme toughness, had transfixed the audience. What shone through her and hypnotized more than 500 people was her compassion, her deep vulnerability and her love of human beings. There was not a dry eye in the house, and my friend and I agreed that Elisabeth was the most powerful speaker we had ever heard."

"I made several trips to her home--a comfortable, sprawling, funky house in the woods. She was quite guarded at first, especially since the press had been lacerating her, but always warm and motherly-plying me with homemade cookies, knitting while we spoke, 'speaking tenderly about her garden and her love of domesticity, her passion for hiking in the mountains. But it quickly became clear that the real thrust of her life has always been her work. She is a woman who has never allowed herself the luxury of being carefree."

"On one of my visits, she had just returned from a week in the Alaskan wilderness, lecturing to a group of Eskimo women and ministering to the dying. (Wherever she speaks, she takes time to see patients and has never charged them for it.) A few weeks later, I caught her right after a trip to a priory in Vermont, where she had spoken to the monks. Her travels and her service to others truly elate her. On the other hand, she seems terribly alone and fatigued, grieving over the loss of her 20-year marriage and the lack of any network of support and love."

"It was inevitable for me to play silent psychoanalyst, to interpret her connection to the Barhams and the spirit-guide clan as a lonely woman's desperate need for caring and contact. After several days together, we visited the Barhams and my suspicions were confirmed. I know that gurus come in a variety of shapes and

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sizes, but I became distinctly uneasy in the presence· of this homely, inarticulate ex-sharecropper and aircraft worker whom Elisabeth had assured me was 'the greatest healer the world has ever known: I was perplexed by her emotional and financial involvement with the, Barhams, and the increasing surrender of her life to them. I found myself, during tae parts of the interview in which we talked about the scandal, wanting to grab her shoulders and shake loose her blindness. But I settled for being a tough-minded reporter, hoping she would see some light. She did not. I found the experience of being with Elisabeth emotionally stirring, indeed, and more than a little disturbing."

PLAYBOY: Let's just dive into the thorniest thicket. For more than a decade, you have been celebrated as a physician and scientist, a woman who won the respect of the scientific community through her pioneering work with terminally ill patients. Then, nearly two years ago, your name made surprising headlines because of your involvement with a so-called guru and his followers, who claimed to be able to make spirits materialize. Since you were the one to apply rational analysis to the stages of death, many of your scientific peers were shocked that you appeared to have taken up with fringe believers in life after death. The scandal that erupted also charged bizarre sexual practices and fakery. What can you say in general about this?

KUBLER-ROSS: Obviously, this is a long and complicated story, and I can't answer it simply. But I want to say, first, that I am a scientist. And, to me, a genuine scientist is a curious person who investigates and uses whatever means are available to find answers to increase our knowledge and our understanding of what the world is like, of what human beings are all about. I have always been skeptical, a superskeptic. It's part of my nature to check out every experience I have, over and over. I always experiment on myself first, and I never publish anything I haven't experienced myself. You understand, I'm still an uptight, logical, square Swiss doctor, a hillbilly, and until a few years ago, I didn't even know words like higher consciousness and I didn't believe in ghosts or poltergeists. All that stuff wasn't for me. I never meditated; I never had a guru or went to India. But I've had some experiences, personally, that have just blown my mind. And I need to keep researching and studying. I do this for my own need; I need to know answers.

PLAYBOY: But as the person who revolutionized the Western world's attitudes toward treatment of the dying, you may have shattered your credibility as a scientist and thus destroyed your life's work.. How do you feel about that?

KUBLER-ROSS: I totally don't care. I am not interested in pleasing anybody or in accommodating anybody or in being loved or in being found credible. I literally don't care about that. I would do this research if nobody in the whole world were to know about it, or accept it. Whether or not my discoveries are acceptable or whether society adores me or hates me or labels me psychotic is irrelevant. I am not doing research to be more of a big shot and get more honorary degrees or to be woman of the year or woman of the century.

PLAYBOY: Truly, you don't care about any of that? About becoming a joke?

KUBLER-ROSS: No. Absolutely not, and I have never cared. The world scorned my work ·with dying patients in the beginning, and then my research into near· death experiences-what happens to people who have supposedly died for a little while and then are revived. So I expect my research into the world of spirit guides will be scorned also. To me, it's a huge reward if normal people begin to open up to even consider what I'm saying. But when that doesn't happen, I continue on just the· same. To me, a decent scientist shares whatever answers he finds and is willing to share how he came to his conclusions. I would be totally unbelievable, and the cheapest form of prostitute, if I would publish only what pleases the public. And I should never try to convert or convince somebody. My job is merely to share. Those who are ready will believe and those who are not will come up with incredible intellectualizations and rationalizations.

PLAYBOY: You've been torn apart especially by the press for these adventures with the spirit world, haven't you?

KUBLER-ROSS: My God, yes. When I started this work, mind you, I was fully aware that I was going to be cut to pieces. The newspapers have printed everything imaginable about me. But so what? You know what welcomed me when I went home to Switzerland for Christmas last year? Headlines asking what happened to "our formerly famous Swiss psychiatrist we were all so proud of, who has now ended up in the gutter . . . .” In the headlines, I have had cancer, I have lost my marbles, I've had venereal disease. They say I don't answer my mail or telephone calls anymore, that I don't respond to the pleas of desperate dying patients and my workshops are sex orgies. They say *that* about my beloved work· shops, where we work our rear ends off from eight in the morning till one A.M., for five days and five nights in a row. You understand how reality can get distorted? But it doesn't really matter, because I will continue my work as long as people sign up for the workshops. All this controversy is only a reflection of the fact that we have to continue our work *because* it's very threatening to a lot of people.

PLAYBOY; We’ll talk about your research in derail later on. First, will you explain briefly what spirit guides are?

KUBUER-ROSS: The first thing you have to understand is that spirit guides are not new. I didn't discover them. As you know, the Bible talks about guardian angels. Children always talk to and about their imaginary "playmates" and then get reprimanded by their parents and teachers and told that they are too old for this childish stuff. Those are nothing but spirit guides—people who have once lived in our physical world and then

have died. Then they decide to help a person during his physical existence. So one or more of them may assign himself to you, for example, from the time you take your first breath until you die--or, I prefer to say, make the transition, which is what death is, making the transition to another realm. The guide's sole purpose is to love you, to direct you, to make sure that everything is done to get you to achieve your objectives in your lifetime. Spirit guides really exist; they are never more than two feet away from you, day and night. Usually, they come to you sometime just before falling asleep or when you are about to wake up. When all your defenses are down, you're more available to them. If you live 100 years, they are always with you. I've been blessed to have a very direct communication with my guides over the past few years.

PLAYBOY: You realize, of course, that that sounds mighty peculiar.

KUBLER-ROSS: Yes, of course I do; but you see, in our society, people are no longer in touch with their own spirituality. They laugh at you when you say you have your own spirit guide inside you. They wouldn't know what you are talking about, naturally. But talk to some old people in the bushes. Aboriginal people know about their guides. All their paintings and drawings are full of their spirit guides, and they communicate with them. American Indians in their tepees, when they chanted together and the medicine man was in -the middle under a blanket, what do you think they did? They materialized their guides, who touched them and healed them. All the things I have learned have existed for thousands of years in all cultures. But then, we say, “Well, those were primitive people.”

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PLAYBOY: Why does it seem so foreign to us?

KUBLER-ROSS: It seems alien to us only since the beginning of this century, as a result of urbanization, of a very mobile kind of life. You live in a city one year, then you move to the next. You have no roots, no religion, no rituals, or spirituality. If you still visit people who have not been contaminated by all the greed, materialism, televisions, cars, moving from place to place—all these people still know what I am talking about.

PLAYBOY: Is the guide's only function to watch over you?

KUBLER-ROSS; There is apparently a vast army of thousands of guides whose purpose is to help us human beings on the planet who are in great danger of self destruction from nuclear weapons. They are here to help us change the tide, to work against the negativity that now threatens our survival. Then there are the personal guides, who are there for each one of us open to them, to direct us to become more positive. For every person who becomes more positive the chances of the planet's self-destruction are minimized. Right now, there are hundreds of groups of people all over the world, people who are in a spiritual search to see if we cannot change this greedy, destructive, war-oriented civilization. They are in contact with their spirit guides and can, under certain circumstances, have the guides materialize. I'm very lucky that I am able to be in touch with them, to see and talk to them, to tape-record them. And, on occasion, they have come in physical form.

PLAYBOY: Do you really think we'll accept what you're saying at face value?

KUBLER-ROSS: My question to you is, Why do you need to accept this? Why is it important? It is my experience, not yours, my life and choice, not yours. Whatever I have learned, I am trying to share with those who want to hear it. And all I can tell people is, if you are open and if you get rid of your own negativity, all this information is available to you when the time is right. That is all I want to communicate. Those who are ready will hear it and those who are not will not.

PLAYBOY: You've mentioned "negativity" several times. How do you define negativity?

KUBLER-ROSS: Anything that drains your energy and prevents you from living in peace, love and harmony. Anything that makes you sick physically or emotionally, or makes you hateful or greedy. You see, the degree of negativity that is triggered in the press and in other people by our work is in direct proportion to the negativity in human beings in the whole world. All my work, my whole purpose is to make people aware of those negative parts of themselves and how they distort their lives and their relationships with it. The whole planet Earth, the whole family of mankind is destroying itself because of negativity.

PLAYBOY: So your purpose in life is no longer to work with dying patients.

KUBLER-ROSS: No. That is just a step. I was taught by my own guides that I had an illusion that death and dying was my work, my contribution to the society in which I have lived for more than 20 years. I truly believed that if I worked hard enough, I would deserve to retire and go back to pottery and weaving, writing, gardening

and mountain climbing. And the guides just laughed in my face. They said my death and-dying work was only a test to see if I could take negativity and hostility. My work has just begun.

PLAYB0Y: When did they tell you that?

KUBLER-ROSS: About five years ago. So my sole purpose is to fight the negativity, to help people become aware of what they do to themselves, their fellow man and the planet because of fear and guilt.

PLAYBOY; What has actually happened to your life since all the publicity about your dealings with spirit guides?

KUBLER--ROSS: Oh, God, it's incredible. My husband of 20 years walked out on me. I simply couldn't believe it. I never dreamed in my wildest dreams I would ever be divorced; nobody in my family ever has. I grew up in a world where when you made a commitment, you made it for good or for bad. And when he walked out on me, I thought it was temporary. But he never came back. And the friends I really counted on have broken off, one after the other. The ones I loved the most, all of them. Not because of the work that we're doing but because of what was in the magazines and newspapers. I lost my beautiful dream house and my garden. I can't say that I'm attached to those things, but I still have a lot of grief about it. Then my relatives wrote to my sister, about the disgrace I had brought to the family. I think they should be very proud of me.

PLAYBOY: How about your workshops and lectures? Was there any detrimental effect on them?

KUBLER-ROSS: It has hurt a lot. For six months after the stories broke, we had cancellations of around $30,OOO and had to refund the money to people who had already registered and then backed out because of the publicity. A lot of my lecture dates were canceled, one week before, but I have so many requests—dating back two years—that there were always replacements within 24 hours from groups that have faith and trust in who I am. But my income dropped drastically, and suddenly I went from famous to infamous. All this at the same time. I had no security of any kind left in my life.

PLAYB0Y: That's an enormous price to pay for doing your spiritual "research," don't you think?

KUBLE-ROSS: Of course. The loneliness has been the worst part. That's my biggest problem. Not a single shoulder to lean on, not a hand to hold. I literally hang in there only because I know this is just part of the process and the work has to be done no matter how much pain it causes, no matter what people say about me. I believe absolutely that I will have to make great sacrifices to bring what I've learned to the world, So I just continue on. I see the fruits of my work and I'm very pleased and proud of our workshops. And the rest—I'm trying hard to take all the b.s. and turn it into fertilizer. But it reaches a proportion where I begin to wonder why it has to be so difficult always.

PLAYBOY: We'll return to the topic of spirit guides and the scandal, but let's go back to the beginning. It should be interesting to follow your track from conservative Swiss psychiatrist to where you are now, in what appears to be a highly spiritual, mystical state of mind. It was in the mid-Sixties that you began your work with death and dying. How did you get into that field of study?

KUBLER-ROSS: I was living in Denver with my family. I had everything: a nice home, two gorgeous children, a loving husband, a good job. But I was bored and unhappy. I had already come to some conclusions about my work with terminally ill patients in Denver and I was asked to give my first lecture in psychiatry for the medical students. That's when I gave the lecture on death and dying that became famous and changed my whole life.

PLAYBOY: Why that subject?

KUBLER-ROSS: I was very nervous about what to talk to them about, especially became these students always sat in class drinking Coca-Cola and chewing gum, with their feet up on chairs, being bored by everything. Then I thought to myself, If these kids are going into orthopedic surgery or obstetrics, they could care less about the origins of psychosis and all that stuff. So I was thinking my brains out to see what I could talk about that didn't even smell of psychiatry. The only thing I could come up with was death and dying, because I thought that would touch upon feelings, anxieties, defenses—everything that has to do with human behavior. I thought it was a brilliant idea. My problem came when I looked for material. I couldn't find a single book. So, I looked into anthropology and came up with the strange rituals people have surrounding death. Wear black veils, where grave stones came from, where burial rules came from. I thought it would be really intriguing to put this together and I put all my love and efforts into this one lecture. After two minutes, the room was dead silence, I had all their attention. Then I put out my theory that most people who are terminally ill know about their dying whether they have been told or not. And they need to communicate; they are willing to share if you are not afraid of them. Then you can actually learn how people cope with dying and their death. You must remember

that, at that time, patients and doctors never talked about this subject. It was taboo. So then I brought into the lecture hall this gorgeous 16-year-old girl who was dying of leukemia.

PLAYBOY: How did they react?

KUBLER-ROSS: You could hear a pin drop. Nobody moved, and I asked for volunteers to interview her on the stage. They were so scared, not one student budged. So I picked six students, but none of them could open their mouths to ask any questions. So I started the interview. It was incredibly beautiful. She did not have any pretenses and was very comfortable talking to them. When they finally started questioning her, they switched to irrelevant stuff, like how high her fever ran and what her symptoms were. She just put them straight and said. "Yes, I know that physicians ask those kinds of questions, but I am trying to convey something else to you." She was so happy and eager to stop playing games, but they were distant and defensive.

PLAYBOY: Those medical students were reacting in the traditional way that physicians often dealt with terminal patients. weren't they?

KUBLER-ROSS: Oh, yes, the callousness of it, the playing games, the downright lying. I have seen a specialist tell his patient she was free of cancer when she was full of cancer and had to ask for a psychiatric consultation because she thought she was imagining pain. That kind of stuff really bothers me. The physician's own fears and anxieties prevent him from listening to a dying patient or communicating with him. Medical training makes him that way. We train them to be detached, not to get personally involved, so they will know everything about your liver and nothing about you as a person. This is much more so in this country, where we train doctors to feel like powerful gods, than it is in Europe. So inhuman.

PLAYBOY: What happened during the lecture?

KUBLER-ROSS; The child finally exploded at all the people who had been lying to her-including her mother. She was just thrilled that she had a chance to do that. She talked about how it was to be alone when her girlfriends stopped visiting her and nothing in her life was like it used to be. The students were completely moved. They had never talked or listened like that with a dying patient. This lecture became so famous that copies were sent all over. Later, when my husband and I moved to Chicago, I got a job teaching psychiatry at the university. but on the side, my real love was to go and visit dying patients. I would teach the nurses, medical students and the social workers how to listen to them, to draw closer instead of back away, to tell the truth and to have a real relationship with the dying.

PLAYBOY: Was your goal to heal or save those patients?

KUBLER-ROSS: Oh, no. My goal was simply to have them live fully until they died, and not just lie there and vegetate, pretending, not being able to share anything. And being doped up until they would finally die. I mean, that is just not how one should end a life.

PLAYBOY: Did you find the work depressing?

KUBLER-ROSS: Never! Every patient recharged my battery. Well, almost everybody. I mean, there were some grouches and sourpusses who wouldn't. But usually, after a visit or two, we would be in an animated sharing of some of this person's life. And I always found what an incredible life each individual had. I became really intrigued by this man or woman, and I felt like I had really achieved something.

PLAYBOY: How would you feel when you lost them?

KUBLER-ROSS: When they died? It was never a terrible loss over any long period of time. It was like, for everyone who died, there were ten waiting to be taken care of. I felt I had no claims to them or any attachment. I was very involved with them while we had the communication going, but no expectations. I mean, you couldn't work with 1000 dying patients and have expectations.

"1 thought that heaven and angels were nice stories for children to abut them

PLAYBOY: At that stage, what were your feelings about afterlife? Did you believe that death was the end?

KUBLER-ROSS: I thought that heaven and guardian angels were nice stories for children to shut them up. Nobody had ever proved anything and I think I left the subject very wide open. My sole understanding was that since there was nothing I could do about whether there was life after death or not, the only thing I could do was to make this life more comfortable and positive. What happens after was somebody else's specialty. If you had asked me at that time if there was a God, most likely I would have said, well, there must be something, but it always had to do with nature. You can't look at a baby or a sunset or a million snowflakes when no two are alike without knowing that there is somebody who decides such ingenious things.

PLAYBOY: At that time. Did you view death as a tragedy?

KUBLER-ROSS: No, never. The only thing I viewed as a tragedy was that we spend our lives like sourpusses and never see the beauty of it, and the miracle of it. Even when a child died, which is supposed to be the greatest catastrophe, I saw tragedy only in how he died, not that he died. I felt the parents had a loan of the child for, say, six years, the glory of having a child for that period. How many couples don't have a child of their own, who would give anything in the world to have one! I felt that at least they were given that gift for six years.

PLAYBOY: You seem to have a powerful connection to children. Your face lights up when you talk about them—even about their death.

KUBLER-ROSS: Yes, that's true. Children are the only living creatures, besides psychotics and dying patients, who are -to· tally honest and are the way God created them. If you are full of baloney, they know that instantly and just turn away from you. They live on an intuitive level. And dying patients have that kind of openness and honesty, because they know they have just a short time left and are not willing to fill their last days with nonsense and irrelevancies. That's not true for everyone who is dying, but it's always true of the ones we work with.

PLAYBOY: The work that made you famous and for which you are still the most acclaimed was your identification and description of the five stages of dying. Let's explore those. How did you arrive at them?

KUBLER-ROSS: You have to understand I did not learn this from dying patients. I learned it from all my years of working with blind people and multiple-handicapped, retarded patients, first in Switzerland and then here. So later, when I was working extensively in Chicago with terminal cases, I first wrote an article for a seminary magazine on my observations. Then, about a year later, the Macmillan publishing house asked me to write a book about my work. This was to be *0n Death and Dying*. I wrote it between midnight and three A.M., and it was simple, like talking to my students. What I put together I had learned from all my patients—such as a blind retarded child and her family's reaction to her. Then, afterward, I discovered that dying patients go through the same stages. And any natural, normal human being, when faced with any kind of loss, will go from shock all the way through acceptance. You could say the same about divorce, losing a job, a maid, a parakeet. Some people go through it if they only lose their contact lens. And even though I called it the stages of dying, it is really a natural adjustment to loss.

PLAYBOY: Describe the stages, one at a time. What is the first?

KUBLER-ROSS: Say you have just been told by the doctor that your abdominal pains are not appendicitis, or something harmless, as you had assumed, but cancer. Your first reaction usually is shock. Why me? I'm only 36 years old, I have three children in preschool. Why me and why now? With the shock is a tremendous numbness, like it's a nightmare that you can't think about. You walk home in a daze; you want to push it under the rug. This is the stage of denial. You won't tell the family, maybe the doctor made a mistake, you'll go to another and be retested, maybe you have to go to the Mayo Clinic. It's all an attempt to deny the reality of this criminal verdict. Denial is used not only during the first stages of illness or after the confrontation with the truth but throughout the illness from time to time. Someone said, "We cannot look at the sun all the time; we cannot face death all the time."

PLAYBOY: Is denial healthy?

KUBLER-ROSS: Absolutely. Some patients have to live for a long time with the knowledge that they're dying, and sometimes they have to deny in order to go on with their daily lives. It allows them to mobilize their defenses. Later on, they will not want to deny anymore; they will want to admit the truth and talk about it and have people listen. Patients rarely deny their condition to the end; I have seen that only a very few times. The shock and denial can't but forever, because some reality of life keeps them from burying their head in the sand. Either they can't hold a job anymore, or lose weight, or start hemorrhaging. Then they have to re-evalu-

ate their financial situation to make provisions for their family. Very realistic issues prevent most people from maintaining denial.

The next stage is one of anger: "I had a thorough physical six months ago and the cancer must have been there; and if the doctor had done a more thorough examination, he would have discovered it before it was too late." The tendency in our society is to blame other people for our miseries, so the patient blames the doctor or the wife for not paying attention to his complaints earlier, or he blames God. People get furious at God. Along with the anger goes envy and resentment toward other people who are healthy. If the person is hospitalized while in this stage of anger, he is the most difficult patient, because the diet isn't right, the way somebody talks when he comes in to take blood is not right, the nurses aren't right. The clergy have a hard time with patients who are angry at God and call Him a bastard. The clergy very quickly try to shut the patient up and I always say to them, “What's the matter with you? Why do you feel a need to come to God's defense? He can take it.” When you begin to make the ministers aware of what they're doing, some of them—not many, mind you—finally begin to realize the damage they are doing to their patients to tell them implicitly that it's all right to be angry with their wives or doctors but not with God.

PLAYBOY: What stage follows anger?

KUBLER-ROSS: If they are allowed to externalize the anger, then they go through a stage of bargaining. Bargaining looks like peace on the surface, but it's a temporary truce: "I will be a good patient if you'll give me one more year to live.” Or, "Just till my children get out of high school." Or, "Just until they get married," It's merely to put a later deadline on the inevitable. But the beauty of the bargaining stage is that this is the ideal time to finish unfinished business. Because they're not so angry that you feel like staying away from them and they're not so depressed yet that everything is a drag.

PLAYBOY: What does "unfinished business" mean?

KUBLER-ROSS: Anything that is incomplete in your life and deprives you of a sense of peace. It is almost always about relationships. During the Vietnam war, the unfinished business was that the parent wanted to stay alive long enough to see his son come home. Or if it's a divorced parent, he won't die until he has found a place for his children. But sometimes the unfinished business is a symbolic "Thank you" that he has not said yet.

PLAYB0Y: Is the bargaining stage peaceful? Does the patient think he's going to get better?

KUBLER-ROSS: In this stage, the patient is in a transient state of peace, and for the family and staff, this is the ideal time. But you have to know it's not a genuine peace, it's just temporary. It's a postponement. Let me tell you the story of a young man. 28 years old who had acute leukemia, with three small children. He had two weeks between the actual onset of his illness and his death.

PLAYBOY: Did he know he had only two weeks?

KUBLER-ROSS: Oh, yes. They always know it. It's not conscious, but they are very aware of it. If you have an accident and only a short time until death, then you go through all the stages much faster than if you have multiple sclerosis that lasts 20 years. And that is how I know that they realize how long they have—they just do their work faster. If they get help, they can go through the stages in one night, but on their own in a negative environment, they can't do it.
Anyway nurse asked me to go talk to Larry, this young man, about his approaching death. Even though I usually wait for a request from the patient, I went in and said, "Larry, would you like to talk about it?" "It," you understand, could be the weather or anything, if he didn't want to talk. I could see he was. rapidly deteriorating. He said, "No, my lips and tongue are too sore." I asked if he wanted me to come back the next day and he said, “Fine, if you like.” That left the door open. The next day, the same. He never asked what we would talk about, so he obviously knew, and knew that I knew, and we kept it on that discreet level. I tried once more. My rule is, you never challenge anybody more than three times. More than that, you are imposing your own needs. The next day, when I saw him, he was sitting up in bed, much more alert than before. I was stunned. Then he told me about his beautiful dream, which is a classic example of bargaining with God. He said, "Last night, I had a dream where I saw this big train going rapidly down the hill toward the end and I had a big fight with the trainmaster. And I demanded that he stop this train one tenth of an inch short." And Larry said to me, "Do you know what I'm talking about?" And I said, "Yes. The train that's speeding down the hill is your life. And your argument was with God." Now, what does that tell you? That he knows he has only a tiny bit of time left and is asking for just a little more.

PLAYBOY: Do people always get the bargain they request?

KUBLER-ROSS: Yes, generally. At that moment, Larry's mother walked in and I said to him. "How can I help you with the tenth of an inch?" He said, "Mother, go home and make my favorite vegetable soup and bake a loaf of bread." She was afraid to leave and he said, "Don't worry. I'll wait for it.” And when she brought it back, he took a tiny taste and smell of that warm bread and a half teaspoon of the soup—he could hardly open his mouth. That was the last food he had in his mouth. He died a few days later.

PLAYBOY: What is the next stage?

KUBLER-ROSS: Depression, in two distinct parts. The first one is a reactive depression, a mourning of all the little losses, of things—his job, energy, the fact that he can't eat anymore. All the losses from being a self-sustaining individual to becoming dependent. The second type of depression I call preparatory grief. He stops mourning all the small deaths and begins to conceive the final death, the final loss. He is in the process of losing everything and everybody he ever loved. Losing life. That is a grief beyond words, because he does not need or wish to communicate that. He withdraws. And at that time, he knows absolutely that he is dying. There is no denial left, the awareness is now totally conscious. The grief during this stage is very important—it's a tool for preparing him for the ultimate peaceful acceptance. This is much more a silent stage than the reactive grief, where he wants to be cheered up and reassured to know that his family is being taken care of, things are being handled. In this second phase, if I'm working with him and he looks at a picture of his grandchild and tears come to his eyes. I can say, "It must be very sad to realize you'll never see your grandchild grown up." And he'll say yes. So he'll cry with you and mourn all those experiences he's going to be deprived of. So now he faces the reality fully. And eventually, he doesn't want to see neighbors or business associates or friends anymore. At the very end, he wants to see only one or two people, his children or his mate. During this time, he is concerning himself with things ahead, rather than behind.

PLAYBOY: The final stage is acceptance, then?

KUBLER-ROSS: Yes. You could call this the stage of positive submission, of accepting what you can't change with a sense of peace and serenity, If he's not allowed to grieve or express anger, he'll never reach this stage. In this last stage, he's neither depressed nor angry, he will have mourned his losses already, and generally he will be tired and weak and will sleep a lot. Not a sleep of avoidance or relief from pain but just extending his sleep time until the final sleep. This is not a "happy" stage, but it is almost without feeling, a void. The struggle is over. The patient wishes to be alone or silent much of the time; communication is mostly nonverbal. A few patients keep struggling to the end, denying, and then it becomes very difficult for them to die with peace and dignity. Sometimes families, for their own needs, encourage their loved one to fight to the end and not to surrender, as if it were cowardly or a rejection of the family.

PLAYBOY: Do those stages always follow in the same order?

KUBLER-ROSS: No. Many people skip stages entirely. Many have been conditioned never to get angry and they suppress it. Nuns and priests have a terribly hard time getting angry. So they often stay stuck in grief, but it's an impotent kind of grief, because what they realty need to do is scream and curse. But they've been so conditioned as good Christians that the preconscious wish to scream causes them guilt. So their guilt and grief dominate them. The biggest help you can give these people is to get them into a screaming room which all hospitals should have, not only for the patients but for the staff and say, "Listen, my friend, you were a human being before you were a nun and anger is a God-given gift. Scream and curse and then I promise you'll feel better." And. Boy, when they hit it, they can take a whole house apart.

PLAYBOY: Does each stage signify a deepening of the experience?

KUBLER-ROSS: Yes. Dying is a growth experience. The last big growth experience the human being has in this lifetime. But you understand, you'll see many patients who never go through the stages, because they haven't had any help and are being lied to by the doctors and ignored by their families, who can't listen to them. That is the essence of my work and my relationship with them. And in a sudden death, like an accident or stroke or heart attack, they are in a stage of physiological shock and have no conscious way of dealing with all the stages. The reason it's a growth experience, or can be, is that for most people, going through the stages is their great chance to learn something they have never learned before. For instance, many people have been rebels all their lives, when they die in character, they die rebelling and fighting until the last. If they get a little help and are not judged or condemned for being nasty patients, they may be able to replace their rebellion with a genuine positive submission, and may have learned the lesson that was the sole purpose of their being born into that physical body.

> “No patient should be deprived of free choice. To me, that is a sacred, universal law. But there are patients who do not want to know they're

PLAYBOY: In your book, you write. "Death is often seen by a child as an impermanent thing and therefore has little distinction from a divorce." Why?

KUBLER-ROSS: I never read my books, so that doesn't sound familiar. But, anyway, normally all children understand is separation, separation from Mommy or Daddy, so that is what death is to them. Later on, they see death as a mutilation—like when they see a dead cat on the pavement or they see a cat tear up a bird, so they naturally associate that with their own life experiences and think of death as a bloody mess, a mutilating thing. That is why they scream bloody murder when they cut their finger and bleed a little tiny bit. Later on, they begin to personalize death and see it as a boogeyman. They don't want to sleep with the lights off, or go into the dark cellar. Normally, preadolescent years, they will grow out of those fantasies, depending on how much fear and guilt they have been fed by adults. But, for example, when my daughter was four years old and we buried her first dog, she wasn't sad. I couldn't understand it, because she was very attached to that dog. When I asked her about it, she said, very casually, "Mom, don't you understand? Next spring, when your tulips come up, he'll come up again and play with me”

PLAYBOY: What happened to her when he didn't?

KUBLER-ROSS: By then, the attachment had already begun to wear off. But it would be very sadistic to a four-year-old child if I had said, "Well, your dog is dead and you'll never see him again." A confrontation with something that she can't conceive of yet. All I said to her was, "'Wouldn't that be lovely?" That leaves it open. So if she needs the denial at that time in her chronological development, then she hears my answer as an affirmation of her need to believe that.

PLAYBOY: That brings us to a basic question: Do you tell a patient that he is dying? Or even that he has cancer?

KUBLER-ROSS: Well, yes and no. It doesn't matter as much that you tell him as how you tell him and what you tell him. No patient should be deprived of free choice. To me, that is a sacred, universal law. That is the greatest gift that human beings have—free choice. But you have to understand that there are patients who do not want to know, and that has to be their choice. So the obvious question is. How do you answer a patient honestly when he asks you? One percent of our American population are what I call deniers. They deny anything, using denial as their main defense. To them, to die with dignity would mean to be able to keep up that stoical front and pretend they don't have cancer. They are proud to appear unaffected. To die with dignity, to me, means to be allowed to die in character, and I have to respect that free choice.

PLAYBOY: How can you tell if someone wants to know the truth or wants to deny?

KUBLER-ROSS: I can usually pick that up when I talk to him for five minutes. Recently, a woman asked me. "How sick. am I?" and I said. "You are very sick," She immediately started to talk about the tragedy of her life, that she was deprived of adopting a child. I agreed that was a very hard thing to accept. You see, she was telling me symbolically that she knew she would be deprived of life and that was difficult knowledge to accept. The art of communication to me is saying the truth in a way that one who is ready to hear it will and one who is not ready won't. That is what physicians and clergy have to learn if they don't want to go around damaging people. You can't go to a patient and say, "You're dying." That's stupid. But if you've done a biopsy and the result comes back and it's malignant and the patient asks you if he has cancer, you have to say yes.

PLAYBOY: You would never lie about that?

KUBLER-ROSS: No. And I would always associate it immediately with hope.

PLAYBOY: Even if there is no hope?

KUSLER-ROSS: There is always hope. But, you see, hope for us the living, for the well, for the non-terminally ill, is something totally different than for a patient who is beyond medical help. When a patient reaches a stage of acceptance and you ask him, "What is your hope now?" You will never hear, “My hope is to get cured or to prolong my life.” You will suddenly hear a shifting of gears. One woman said to me, very philosophically. "I hope God accepts me in His garden." Now, I would be a stupid psychiatrist if I said, "Oh, come on, now, we're going to get you well." She would just throw me out of the room. Or she would stop talking to me, because she would know that I couldn't take the truth. But, instead, I said to this woman, "Let's talk about this garden. “That does it look like in your imagination”" So she knew that I knew and that we were speaking the truth.

PLAYBOY: If a dying patient asks you what his odds are, what do you tell him, since you want to tell the truth but associate it with hope?

KUBLER-ROSS: I tell him 50 percent the first year, less the second, and so on, but I never add it up to 100 percent. Those who really want to know say, "Hey, doc, “When I add that up, it makes only 99 percent.” And I say, "Yes, I always keep one percent for hope." Because there are miracles. I never predict to a patient how long he will live, because it is never accurate, never, ever, ever. There are some young men who contemplate starting a business or a family, a young woman who wants to have a child. Their time is very important. I will level with them as to what the statistical probabilities are, but I very much exaggerate anything else because of how incompetent we really are at predicting.

PLAYBOY: In *On Death and Dying*, you write, "The more we are making advancements in science, the more we seem to fear and deny the reality of death." Would explain that?

KUBLER-ROSS: In our society, we have discovered an incredible number of things. We have been able to lick infectious diseases that eradicated millions of people at one time. We've been able to transplant organs. We are very close to a time, I believe, when scientists and medicine will believe that they can conquer death itself, People have believed in nothing else but science and money, and that if you would get enough money and brain power together, you could conquer cancer absolutely, and then death itself—as if there is no limit to human capability. We have such an enormous fear of cancer that you can get thousands and thousands in grant money to study it. What people don't understand is that it would be the greatest tragedy to do away with cancer.

PLAYBOY: How do you justify that statement?

KUBLER-ROSS: Well, just visualize what it would be like if all malignancies were eradicated. People would live up to 100, 130, and almost all of them would have strokes. Every house would be full of paralyzed, incontinent old people unable to speak. About a third of the population would be able to earn a living, but they couldn't continue to do that, because they would have to take care of all these incapacitated stroke patients. Don't you think they would be better off to have cancer, which helps them make the transition within a reasonable time, or would you rather they die after six years in a hospital ward unable to speak or urinate or move a finger? Do you understand?

PLAYBOY: So cancer, to you, fulfills a function.

KUBLER-ROSS: Naturally. All illness fulfills a function. In the old days, if it weren't for epidemic diseases, people would have starved to death, which is infinitely worse.

PLAYBOY: What about the pain of cancer?

KUBLER-ROSS: You do not need to have pain anymore; we can keep all our cancer patients pain free and alert and conscious. My work is to use the science of medicine and the art of medicine to help them finish whatever unfinished business they have in life. And to convey all this to the medical people who are responsible, so that 70 percent of our terminally ill don't have to die in institutions, which is totally unnecessary, but can die at home. And that children under 14 who cannot visit hospitals and are deprived of being with their family members will be permitted to see and be involved with the death of a loved one.

PLAYBOY: But because of your work, aren't the treatment of terminal patients and the medical establishment's way of dealing with death changing?

KUBLER-ROSS: God, yes. Last year, 125,000 courses in death and dying were taught in this country alone, and that's not including Europe and Australia and Japan. Not all of them are good, mind you, but at least it's now a valid subject; and nurses, social workers, priests, and medical students can learn how to minister to a dying patient. Medicine is now irrevocably moving in the direction of healing and spirituality—the way it was 100 years ago, before doctors became exclusively scientists.

PLAYBOY: Let's talk a bit about cancer, with which most of your work seems to be. What do you think causes cancer?

KUBLER-ROSS: I believe it is a slow-growing virus. and under certain circumstances, and especially when there is enough anguish and pain from recent personal loss—it is statistically verifiable that such loss is a precipitating factor in the onset of cancer—that latent existent virus becomes fulminating, grows rapidly and becomes symptomatic. And I believe that if people could be in total harmony, without all the negativity that

we've been talking about, cancer would be extremely limited. I. also think that society itself causes more cancer than it cures by spreading fear tactics, and you know we always get what we're most afraid of. We create our own.

PLAYBOY: Are you afraid of getting cancer?

KUBLER·ROSS: Heck, no. If I could choose between cancer and a sudden death or a stroke, I would definitely choose cancer.

PLAYBOY: You smoke incessantly and have a hacking persistent cough. Aren't you afraid of smoking?
KUSLER-ROSS: No. I enjoy it.

PLAYBOY: Everybody who smokes enjoys it. That's not the point.

KUSLER-ROSS: I have been telling you that nothing can touch you if you're not afraid of it. Voodoo death cannot kill you if you're not afraid; cigarettes cannot touch you if you're not afraid of them. You can only be damaged by those things you fear.

PLAYBOY: What is your opinion of Laetrile?

KUBLER-ROSS: As I've said, the greatest crime we commit in our society is that we deprive people of their own free choice, If I had cancer, I would evaluate carefully the results of chemotherapy the loss of hair and the nausea and the vomiting. All that to get, say, an extra three months' life, because chemotherapy does not cure 99 percent of the patients. It only prolongs their life. So if I want to choose to take Laetrile instead, for my own needs, even if they are only psychological, no one in the world should be able to make that choice for me. I would greatly resent anybody telling me what I can or cannot do with my own life. All I can say about Laetrile is that anything helps if you believe. I can give you a placebo and you'll get well. Don't you believe that emotions and belief and hope are healing? If you need Laetrile to have hope, it will help you.

PLAYBOY: Where do you stand on euthanasia?

KUBLER-ROSS: I believe very much in euthanasia. The word literally means "a good death." I do not believe in mercy killing, because in the universal law, it is a very grave crime to take another person's life or your own life. All the positive experiences you've ever had in this lifetime—every one—are annulled for all your future lifetimes if you take a life. My mother once begged me, while she was totally healthy, that if she ever became a vegetable, I would give her an overdose. It was the most unpleasant dialog I have ever had with my mother. I said, "I will never be able to kill you. If it should happen all I can do for you is what I do for my patients. I will help you live until you die, but I cannot help you die or speed up your death."

PLAYBOY: It is difficult to find a definition of death that satisfies everybody—physicians, clergymen, the law. Do you have one?

KUBLER-ROSS: Yes, I do. And the truth is I really got into studying near-death cases because I was obsessed with finding out what death really is, what an accurate definition is. I was asked to write a chapter on death for the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, and when I did elaborate research, I discovered that all the definitions were exclusively about the physical body. So I said, if that is what medicine is all about—they are only interested in the physical body and they are the ones defining death—then I must come up with something that will include what human beings are besides the physical body. I knew it was crucial to know at what point it was all right to take a kidney or a heart out. Or when not to bother with life-prolonging procedures, because we would know when a person was actually dead. My definition of death extends beyond, way beyond, the physical body: There is an invisible energy cord between the real immortal you and your physical body. You are not born into eternal life—if I may use that language until the cord is severed. When you are hanging between life and death, like some comatose patients, you are out of the physical body most of the time, but that cord is not severed yet, so you are not dead. What we need to develop, and probably some physicist will do that eventually, are people who are attuned to see the cord, or some photographic technique that can record it. Probably something like a Geiger counter will be used to measure the energy concentration that is the cord. So the final, permanent, irreversible death is when the cord between the immortal entity and the physical body has been severed. And what's missing now is either a photographic technique or an energy measurement machine.

PLAYBOY: So death to you has nothing to do with brain waves or heart function.

KUBLER-ROSS: Heck, no. That only describes the level of functioning of the physical body, the cocoon.

PLAYBOY: The next phase of your work was your research with people who had had near-death experiences. That was when you became convinced of the existence of an afterlife. You began to move down a path of mysticism, away from your rigid scientific history. How did that begin?

KUBLER-ROSS: About 13 years ago, while I was working extensively with dying patients in Chicago, I started to think deeply about my involvement with my patients. I would get very dose to them. I loved most of them deeply, but my own experience was that the moment they died, for me it was like a shell was in the bed—and I had no more relationship with that shell. I would walk out and all I would feel was that I had done my best and goodbye, it's finished, despite all the special and profound moments we'd shared. I asked my colleagues what was wrong with me, was I a cold cookie because I didn't grieve? But that didn't feel right: I knew I would have given my life for some of my patients. So I started to consider that there must be something more than just the physical body and that was why I wasn't experiencing loss or grief when they died. You cannot work with dying patients for long without asking intelligent questions. But my first step was simply an intellectual curiosity; it had nothing to do with spiritual needs or awareness. Trying to find the answers to life after death was the last thing on my mind.

PLAYBOY: How did you find a way to research that topic?

KUBLER-ROSS: There is an old saying that when the pupil is ready, a teacher will appear. Within five days of asking those questions, I got my first case. Mrs. Schwartz came into the hospital and told us how she had had a near-death experience. She was a housewife from Indiana, a very simple and unsophisticated woman, you understand. She had advanced cancer, had hemorrhaged and was pm into a private hospital, very dose to death. The doctors attempted for 45 minutes to revive her, after, which she had no vital signs and was declared dead. She told me later that while they were working on her, she had an experience of simply floating out of her physical body and hovering a few feet above the bed, watching the resuscitation team work very frantically. She described to me the designs of the doctors' ties, she repeated a joke one of the young doctors told, she remembered absolutely everything. And all she wanted to tell them was relax, take it easy, it is, all right, don't struggle so hard. The more she tried to tell them, the more frantically they worked to revive her. Then, in her own language, she "gave up" on them and lost consciousness. After they declared her dead, she made a comeback and lived for a year and a half. I took her to my medical class and she shared that experience. She was quite upset and afraid maybe she was crazy.

PLAYBOY: What did you tell her?

KUBLER-ROSS: I said I didn't know what to call her experience, because I had never heard of that. But I accepted it as a reality, that it had actually happened to her. My students attacked me. Why didn't I call this a hallucination, a delusion they said? I said, "What's the matter with you arrogant, grandiose guys? What interest would this woman have in lying? Can you understand that there are million things that you don't know yet?" I tried to convey to them that it was time to just be open. The students were very, very upset. So the man I was working with—this beautiful black minister—and I decided that we would embark on a top-secret mission and collect 20 cases; and if we could find the 20 people with similar experiences—then there must be another 20 somewhere in the world, and then we would publish them.

PLAYBOY: Why did you assume you could find 20 other cases and that that wasn't Mrs. Schwartz's unique experience?

KUBLER-ROSS: I can't really answer that. I just knew intuitively. I was totally sure that if we would just keep the door open and not judge and label everything, we would find other people. The woman was much too authentic and genuine, and she could recall those things while she had a flat EEG (electroencephalogram). You must understand that medically there is no possible explanation for that. And we checked out every bit of her story with the doctors. We've had people who were in severe auto accidents, had no vital signs and told us how many blowtorches were used to extricate them from the wreck. And we verified all of it. Or a person knocked down by a hit-and-run driver, had no vital signs and gave us the license number of the car. And they were all watching the scene from a distance, seeing themselves in the wreck, or lying on the highway, like watching a movie. They were very peaceful and serene while they observed. That is, by the way, what we call an out-of-body experience—where you leave your physical body and observe yourself from another place. In a near-death experience, the body becomes perfect again. Quadriplegics are no longer paralyzed, multiple sclerosis patients who have been in wheelchairs for years say that when they were out of their bodies, they were able to sing and dance. Mrs. Schwartz, who had had a breast removed and had had a colostomy, experienced her physical body as whole and undamaged.

PLAYBOY: But that could be a projection of wishful thinking.

KUBLER-ROSS: OK, so if you are a very skeptical. choosy scientist, which I have always been and always will be, you take totally blind people who don't even have light perception, don't even see shades of gray. If they have a near-death-experience, they can report exactly what the scene looked like at the accident or hospital room. They have described to me incredibly minute details. How can you explain that?

PLAYBOY: We can’t.

KUBLER-ROSS: The next step, after the floating experience that they describe, is that the person then goes through a tunnel. It may also be a mountain pass or down a beach. That symbol is a variable in different cultures. This is actually the transition from the physical body, the passing from this life to the next life. Everybody reports that he sees a light, brighter and more beautiful than anything he has ever seen. And they head toward the source of the light. The closer they get to it, the more they are engulfed in an indescribable sense of love and compassion. This light is what people call Christ or God or spiritual energy—there are different labels for it. Waiting for them are their loved ones who have preceded them in death. They are very happy, content, loved and feel no urge to return to life. Many report that they are then given a choice to return or not, but they feel they have to come back to complete some task or unfinished business.

PLAYBOY: Even if we accept what you are reporting—

KUBLER-ROSS: But you don't have to accept it. That's not my intention or hope and it's not my purpose.

PLAYBOY: All right, but let's take it a step further. A near-death experience is still not death itself; so how can you make a leap to an assumption about what actually happens to people after they *die*?

KUBLER-ROSS: You don't have to be critically ill to experience this, and I have had those experiences many times. You see, you really don't even need to work with dying patients to get this information. All we are talking about are the out-of-body experiences, which millions of people have had. I have made the transition to the other side many times, going through a mountain pass with wild flowers. I can sit in a chair in California and with the speed of my thought be with my sister in Switzerland, out of my physical body. A man named Robert Monroe is doing this research in Virginia and thousands of people have created these trips for themselves, I will tell you about mine, if you like.

PLAYBOY: Yes, but let's stick with this for a moment. What, then, is the difference between an out-of-body experience, a near-death experience and death?

KUBLER-ROSS: Simple. When you are permanently dead, you do not reenter your body on the bed. Your soul—or call it your entity, your immortal self does not come back to this life. And the first step—shedding your body, going through the tunnel or mountain pass, seeing the light—is the same for all of those. To use the most simplistic language: Before you are in heaven, you have to leave your body. In order to free the butterfly, your soul, you have to shed your cocoon, the physical body, And in order to leave your body, you have to have an out-of-body experience, When you ask 1000 people what it was like at the moment they thought they were about to die, they all share the same out-of-body experience.

PLAYBOY: How many cases have you actually researched?

KUBLER-ROSS: After a few hundred, we stopped counting because it dawned on us that we could present 100 or 100,000 cases and we would always get the same objections.

PLAYBOY: Some of the research that has been done by other people into near-death-experiences results in conclusions opposite to your findings. There are stories, for example, of people who go kicking and screaming into death, and it is apparently a horrible, terrifying experience for them. Or a near-death situation where the people remember nothing, have no awareness.

KUBLER-ROSS: The latter is very true. You know that you dream every night and mostly can't recall the dreams. You also have out-of-body experiences every night and have no awareness of that. I would say that probably nine out of ten people who have a temporary cardiac arrest and then live again have absolutely no recall. I don't take that as any kind of meaningful evidence. As for the negative experiences, I know that research, from a cardiologist in Florida. If you know that coronaries are the result of repressed anger and fear, and that all the subjects of his research not only were coronary cases but were from that area of the country—the southeast up of the Bible Belt—you will understand why these patients saw hell and brimstone and Satan. They are raised in a church that teaches guilt and condemnation and sin. So when someone like that is near death and his defenses fall apart, he becomes a very frightened child again, and all the stories from Sunday school come back. The Devil is going to take him. It is a projection of his lifelong fears. If you study 1000 Hindus who never heard about fire and brimstone, not one of them will see Satan.

PLAYBOY: What that suggests is that *all* near-death reports may be a projection. One person with a certain acculturization will see hell when he is about to die and another person with a different history will see grandma at the end of a long tunnel greeting him. What's the difference? Why is your research any more real than the other?

KUBLER-ROSS: You are exactly where I was years ago: you are asking the same questions I asked. So you should go and check it out yourself.

PLAYBOY: But you even said a moment ago that to accumulate more case studies was pointless. What makes it unquestionable reality for you that death is what you say it is?

KUBLER-ROSS: My own experiences. I have had all those experiences that precede permanent death, as I told you. And once you have had those experiences, you know, beyond a shadow of a doubt and no matter what the whole world will say. And all you feel like doing is smiling and saying, just wait until you make the transition and you'll know.

PLAYBOY: Would you admit what what you just said is not scientific?

KUBLER-ROSS: Not scientific in the way that you define science, yes.

PLAYBOY: And you know, as a scientist, that it is not enough to say it is a fact because you say it's a fact.

KUBLER-ROSS: Not for you, but it's enough for me. There are many things I know as fact that I don't understand. I just know they are true.

PLAYBOY: Well, that stops this line of dialog in its tracks. We have nowhere to go with that. So knowing now how you define "scientific evidence," let us go on with the "facts," and we won't constantly ask for verification. At least that seems to be the only choice you leave us.

KUBLER-ROSS: But you see, *you* could verify everything I say. You. It has been duplicated by dozens of scientists and people from all over the world, But you yourself could go and sit with dying children and listen to them. Find out for yourself. Take blind people and see what they can see when they are supposedly dead, have them tell you how many people are in a room and what they wear.

PLAYBOY: But you have also said that if we spoke with people who saw fire and brimstone, we should discount those.

KUBLER-ROSS: No. no. You design your own research project that is satisfactory to your criteria, not to mine. Do it with someone in a lab in an out-of-body experience, which is the same as near-death. Make a shelf right under the ceiling and put a book way up there, while the person lies on a couch. Then have that person tell you the name of the book. If you really want to know the answers, invest the time and the energy and investigate. You'll find the answers. That is all you can do in order to realize that I am not crazy and I am not confabulating. But you see that I cannot do that for you. I cannot tell you how many months of my life I have spent verifying my findings for other people's needs. I supplied them with data, with everything, and the moment I did, they said, "But this could be something *else*." And no matter what I supplied, they always came up with another intellectualization. So I have stopped doing that for other people.

PLAYBOY: What happens, in your view, after death?

KUBLER·ROSS: After you shed your cocoon, you are temporarily in a transient, nonphysical state called the ethereal body. Then you lose that ethereal body and become the pure form of a soul. We call that the entity or self. The self is an energy pattern and exists where there is no space and no time. It is immortal and eternal. That is the real you, the you that cannot die. So after you have this experience of being in the ethereal body, you are placed in an environment that is comfortable and familiar to you, in order to make the transition in a non-frightening, non-provoking way. So that will be the tunnel or, for me, my beautiful mountain pass. It could be the image of anything that separates or connects. Like a river, a gate, a wall, a door.

PLAYBOY: Is there any time attached to that phase?

KUBLER-ROSS: It is probably hours, maybe days. I don't know. At any rate, then you shed the ethereal body and become this incredibly beautiful energy pattern. There are hundreds in the room right now. Very few human eyes have ever seen that, but I have twice. I don't know why that gift was given to me.

PLAYBOY: Can you experience their presence right now?

KUBLER-ROSS: Right now, no, I only know that they are here. But sometimes I can tune into that, like tuning into a wave length. It's an incredible mystical experience, but it's much easier to see them when it's dark. Each energy, soul, has a different pattern. Exactly like snowflakes—billions of them and no two alike, no two human beings ever exactly alike on this whole planet.

PLAYBOY: Is this soul, or energy pattern, a higher form than we are?

KUBLER-ROSS: It is not higher nor is it lower. It is just you, the real you. When you are born into a physical body, you need that body to have all the experiences in a physical world that you could not have without a body and a limiting brain, and your amnesia, which causes you to forget all your past lives. That is for the purpose of your growth. You have to be in this temporary prison that we call physical life, and you stay in this form until you have all of the positive experiences that this existence can afford you. But when you are in an energy pattern, you have access to all knowledge, understanding, compassion and unconditional love. You have all the wisdom of the universe.

PLAYBOY: How long do you stay in that phase?

KUBLER-ROSS: Until you have completed your destiny, and then you return to the source from which you came. You return to God.

PLAYBOY: When do you come back in another human form?

KUBLER-ROSS: If you have not passed the test, if you haven't completed all the lessons that you need to learn in the physical world. Then you come back before you return to God. Needless to say, you choose the time of history, your parents, the country, the environment that is most conducive to the fulfillment of your own destiny. You make the commitment of what you will do with your existence this time. You pick your own major and minor and your school, so to speak.

PLAYBOY: Can you move back and forth in time?

KUBLER-ROSS: No, you can't. That's the universal law. There are three universes. One is the physical in which we live right now. It is very dense, created out of physical energy, terribly limited. Then there is the unobstructed universe where we go after we die, and where we continue our growth and learning experiences. In that universe, there are guides and guardian angels who look after us so we can complete and graduate. Then there is the third and that is synonymous with what the churches would call heaven. That is the source and God to whom we all return. Only after you have graduated from the second universe, the unobstructed universe, can you even see that absolutely final one. Every step higher gives you more love, compassion and wisdom.

PLAYBOY: When Hitler died, would he have experienced all this love and compassion? Didn't he have to pay for his evil doings?
KUBLER·ROSS: Now you are getting to the evaluation. In the unobstructed world, in the presence of this guidance and unconditional love, you are asked to evaluate your life. No one can do that for you, and you review every word, thought, every deed of your total existence—and that includes your past lives if you have had past lives. So your example of Hitler is a good one, because to me, Hitler is the most negative person who ever lived. But negativity can only exist in the realm of the physical person. In the realm of spiritual energy that is God-created, negativity cannot exist. It is all unconditional love. Therefore, when Hitler stands in the presence of his life and does his evaluation, he watches, with compassion, the death of the 1,500,000 people he killed at Maidenek concentration camp. He will watch the results of the constant choices in his life. He will watch this not with grief, agony and guilt, because these negative emotions do not exist. Instead of self-pity or self-loathing, he will have compassion.

PLAYBOY: For himself?

KUBLER-ROSS: And for all the tragedy he has caused. He will have an incredible understanding of why he became the man he did, what he needed to learn; he will understand the time of history in which he lived and that supported him and pushed him in that direction. He will probably gain in understanding of human behavior far more than most human beings ever gain. And that, you must understand, will be a huge asset when he chooses how he will return in order to become a great leader,

PLAYBOY: Will he inevitably come back as a great leader?

KUBLER-ROSS: Yes. He misused his powers for destruction and failed to lead a nation to its more positive, fulfilled existence. For this, by the way, he may have to wait 3000 years or 5000 years, in order to find a nation

that offers the opportunity to undo all his misdeeds. Then he will probably be the greatest leader who ever existed.

PLAYBOY: Perhaps he's back already.

KUBLER-ROSS: No.

PLAYBOY: How do you know that?

KUBLER-ROSS: Well, that is a very private thing that I asked. My whole early life was shaped by Hitler and Nazi Germany, so I wanted to know. Now, when he is reborn, he will not carry the burden of guilt or the awareness of who he was. Never. But he will choose parents who will create in him the qualities that a great leader needs––self-love, self-trust, assertiveness, confidence. And the right time and place in which to become that.

PLAYBOY: Could you say, then, that Gandhi or the Dalai Lama was possibly a Hitler in another lifetime?

KUBLER-ROSS: It is very conceivable, but not necessarily true. Some make it the first time. God creates everybody to fulfill his destiny in one lifetime, but very few make it, maybe one in a billion. I don't know the percentages; I'll have to ask that one. The shortest time between the creation of a human being and his return to God was 43 years. The longest has been 2,000,000 years and he is still in this universe and has not made it yet. Just to give you some idea of what the options are. Whether it is an endless journey of thousands of years or one lifetime depends on whether we have been raised with discipline and unconditional love, so that you become a spiritually aware human being and can spend your life with a partner who is fulfilling and gratifying.

PLAYBOY: That certainly doesn't apply to a lot of people, does it? .

KUBLER-ROSS: No. But you will always have another chance, There is nobody who doesn't make it, because God doesn't know punishment or condemnation.

PLAYBOY: Nowhere in this picture is there a hell or a purgatory or damnation.

KUBLER-ROSS: Of course not. Those things do not exist. I have always known that. But most Western societies preach sin, and condemnation, which is why there is so little room for real spiritual development.

PLAYBOY: Now for the obvious question: How do you know all this?

KUBLER-ROSS: From my spirit guides. From our very direct communication.

PLAYBOY: Tell us about your first experiences with spirit guides.

KUBLER-ROSS: I had my first one in a laboratory, about nine years ago. I happened to find a book called *Journeys Out of the Body*, and although I found it dreadfully boring, I began to see that there were hundreds of people having these spontaneous experiences. So I wrote to the author, Bob Monroe, who is an inventor and a sound engineer, who had a laboratory in the mountains in Virginia. He invited, for me, a group of physicians, psychiatrists, people from the Menninger Foundation and engineers, to come together to do these experiments. And he invited me to stay in his little guesthouse on the edge of the forest. The way it worked, he had me lie on a tiny water bed in a little cubbyhole in his laboratory, and I was hooked up to polygraphs and wearing earphones through which I heard tapes of the sound of something like waves and a combination of waves superimposed onto one another. The purpose of those tapes was to have you go into a non-normal reality state, and then he would give you instructions in relaxation. All of a sudden, I was on the ceiling. I was so excited that you couldn't believe it. It was really the highlight of my life up to that point. Then the lab chief called me back through the earphones. She said I was going too fast, or too soon. Later, when everybody discussed what they had experienced, I gave her hell and said, "Don't interfere with me," I explained that I am a procrastinator, but once I do something, I go all the way, further than anybody else and I am not afraid of it. That's my personality.

PLAYBOY: Did you do that again?

KUBLER-ROSS: The next day. I told myself that I was going to go faster than the speed of light and further than any human being has ever been. Well, the second I was hooked up. I went wheeetttt––literally faster than the speed of light. One second I was on a horizontal course, then a vertical one. Then I saw that you can be anywhere you want with the speed of your thought. When I came back, everybody stared at me. I did not know what they saw, but they said I looked like an altered person. Incidentally, I was a very sick girl, close to critically ill when all this happened. I had almost a total bowel obstruction. I couldn't do anything that lasted over an hour and a half because of the abdominal pains, and I was living on Pro-Banthine. \When I came out of

the lab, it took me about three hours to be aware that I was healed. I touched my stomach and there was no pain or tenderness.

PLAYBOY: How long did that trip last?

KUBLER-ROSS: Maybe 15, 20 minutes. When I awoke, I couldn't remember exactly where I had been, but I knew that every molecule in my body had changed. I felt unlimited. And the staff said I looked illuminated, rejuvenated, like I had had a transcendental experience. And it lasted days and days. I was dying to know where I had been, but the only thing that came back to my consciousness was two words: Shanti Nilaya. All that anybody knew was that Shanti means peace in Sanskrit. They tried hypnosis and everything they knew so I could remember, but I had blocked out all conscious awareness. About one in the morning, walking back to the little house, I suddenly knew that I had gone too far with my awareness and the thought crossed my mind that it was too dangerous to be there alone that night. Then another thought that it was useless to worry, because I had already stepped beyond a certain barrier. So I kept the night light on, but I couldn't sleep, because I knew the moment I did, it would happen. No idea what it was, but I just knew that something horrendous was going to happen.
I tossed around for about a half hour, and then it hit me like lightning. I went through an experience that is really beyond description; I can only share it in inaccurate words. I had become every patient I ever attended, and I went through the deaths of every single person whose life I had ever touched. It was excruciating physical agony; I was doubled up in pain and felt there would be no release. I went through a thousand deaths, one right on top of the other, like labor pains but with no time to
catch my breath between. But it wasn't just physical agony, it was also spiritual, emotional, every aspect that a human could experience. And there was nobody to call for help. I begged for a shoulder to lean on, specifically a man's left shoulder for me to put my head on in the agony. Suddenly a voice came from nowhere and everywhere, a very deep, loving but firm voice, a man's voice. Three and a half years later, when I met the guides, I recognized the voice. He said, "You shall not be given.” And the agony continued.

PLAYBOY: So that was your first contact with the spirit guides.

KUBLER-ROSS: Yes.

PLAYBOY: How long did your agony continue?

KUBLER-ROSS: I'm not sure, but I think about three and a half hours. Then I asked for a hand to hold and the same voice came: "You shall not be given.” The agony was unthinkable, indescribable. Suddenly, it stopped. Stopped. Then everything in the room started this high-speed vibration, everything I touched with my eyes turned into a million molecules vibrating. My belly was vibrating at the same speed and there was the bright incredible light that my patients described moving toward. I merged into that light and all I can tell you is—it was like 10,000 orgasms. Everything became one and I merged into it. Two sentences came to me; one was, "I am acceptable," and the other was, "I am part of one." I fell into a trancelike sleep and later, when I walked down the hill, I was totally in love with the universe. I couldn't talk about that experience to anyone for a long time, until a few months later, I gave a lecture in Berkeley, to a group of transpersonal psychology students. I knew that was the place I could share what I had experienced. They greeted my story with reverence and respect. They told me that was a very well-known phenomenon called cosmic consciousness. And they told me Shanti Nilaya means "the final home of peace." That is why I have called my beloved healing center Shanti Nilaya.

PLAYBOY: So that was the turning point for you.

KUBLER-ROSS: The greatest turning point of my life. Until a few years ago, when I met my guides.

PLAYBOY: It’s interesting to see the path you've taken in your life; there seem to be several threads from your childhood:
even as you call yourself a "straight, square scientist," you have always chosen unconventional arenas to play in, always worked on the fringes of society. Why?

KUBLER-ROSS: You really have to go back to how I was born, if you want the whole story. I was a triplet, probably the greatest tragedy you can imagine. No body wants a whole litter, for one thing. Then, one of my sisters and I were identical and our parents couldn't tell us apart. So, although I had everything––good parents, all the material things in the world, I was pretty and intelligent and had lovely dresses––but I had absolutely nothing. My parents didn't know which one of us was sitting on their laps or who they were bathing. And that beginning is the only reason I'm in this work, I'm sure. Because it taught me that if you aren't acknowledged as a unique human being, you have nothing. So 30 years later, there I am, working with chronic hopeless schizophrenics who have no name, no identity. I've worked with blind, retarded, multiple-handicapped children

who were only numbers in institutions. And I've worked with dying cancer patients who were outcasts and ignored. Without my upbringing, where I had everything but nothing, I would never have gotten into this work.

PLAYBOY: There was obviously a deep sense of identification between you and humanity's "outcasts.”

KUBLER-ROSS: Oh, yes. All of those miserable people, I know every one of them like a book. And they always know that. Our communication is unique. They trust me.

PLAYBOY: And you've always had a loathing for traditional middle-class life, haven't you?

KUBLER-ROSS: Absolutely. I never even wanted to come to this country; I wanted to practice medicine in Africa or India. But my husband got a job as an intern in a hospital on Long Island, so I had to go there. I was miserable. When I was 16 years old, after the war, I was working in ravaged Poland, wandering like a gypsy, organizing soup kitchens and typhoid stations and running a tiny clinic and I was super content. Every day we were able to help so many people and it was complete happiness for me. There were no doctors, people came in with shrapnel wounds, and they would give me a chicken for payment. That's where I really got my medical training, you understand. And I could have lived like that forever, with nothing in my pocket. And here I was in this fancy hospital, hating those spoiled brats and those parents who indulged them so. It was so boring, that work. So then later, when I got the chance to work with chronic schizophrenics, it was a challenge for me. I got on very well with psychotic patients; I was totally motivated and had great success with them. But I didn't even know how to talk to a neurotic.

PLAYBOY: Since you have traveled so much of the time over the past decade, seeing patients and lecturing and conducting your workshops, how has that affected the quality of your family life?

KUBLER-ROSS: I wasn't home very much, of course, since I've been traveling about 250,000 miles a year, especially recently. But when you are married to me for 20 years, you get used to a lot of things. I am not a very easy woman to live with, because I am impulsive. If I have an intuition that I have to go to Switzerland, I go. If I feel that I have to make a house call to a patient in Anchorage, Alaska, I go. Not many men can tolerate that, even though I made the money in the family. But he was very tolerant of my traveling. Our values were as different as night and day. He hated what I call old-fashioned happiness, hiking in the mountains, and I hated going to hotels. We usually compromised.

PLAYBOY: How about your children? You have two?

KUBLER-ROSS, Yes, a boy and a girl. My kids are very beautiful and special and because I wasn't home much, our times together were very intense. I love to cook and bake, so on weekends I cooked all the meal, for the family and put them in the freezer so they could always have a home-cooked meal. And my kids never got on my nerves, because if you see your children only two days a week, you never get tired of them, and the moment they made me crazy, it was time to pack my suitcase again. When I was home, my daughter and I would can vegetables together or we would bake cookies. It was like Christmas.

PLAYBOY: When you began having mystical experiences, how did your husband react?

KUBLER-ROSS: At first he listened to them kind of patiently. He didn't knock them, but he couldn't really understand or empathize. Later on, of course, when I became so immersed, he left.

PLAYBOY: So, in a sense, your belief in spirit guides ended up destroying your family life. You said your very first encounter was during that hair-raising experience. When was your next one?

KUBLER-ROSS: It happened five years afterward. There was this group of people in Escondido, California, right outside San Diego, who worked together for years and years with spirit guides. It was their private search for answers, their seeking of guidance and help.

PLAYBOY: Was that the group of Jay and Marti Barham, the couple who are now your partners? The people around whom the scandal erupted?

KUBLER-ROSS: Yes. These were called darkroom sessions, and the people who came ran the gamut from physicians and policemen to housewives. There are a hundred other groups in America that do that. So, at one of their sessions, the guides told a nurse that I would soon be meeting them. She wrote me a letter telling me, even saying the date on which the guide predicted I would be there. Now, I get lots of kookie letters, as you can imagine. I just put it away, but it bothered me like you wouldn't believe and I went back and read it again. I looked to see where I was booked that weekend, to see if I would be in the same town and, if not, then I knew it was a kook letter. And darn, it was a weekend when I was at home. Within one hour, I got an emergency phone call begging me to come to California to give a lecture. It was in San Diego, on the same date! I was

very open-minded and I felt that if it were real, it was probably the greatest miracle of my life; if not, at least it wasn't a wasted trip.

PLAYBOY: Did you meet Jay Barham that weekend?

KUBLER-ROSS: Yes. He was there. And the nurse, who told me what to expect in the session. I was very excited. There were 75 people in the room, sitting in chairs, and the moment I walked in, they started to sing. The room was illuminated just enough to see clearly, but the guides cannot materialize with bright lights, so it was pretty dark. I sat in the front row, and just to have 75 people who were willing to drive from all over California for me was a very touching moment. About five minutes later, this huge figure suddenly appears, 7' 10” exactly, walks by me and starts talking to the group.

PLAYBOY: A male?

KUBLER-ROSS: A male. Black. Dressed in a flapping white headdress, like a Bedouin, and a long white robe. The first words he said, in this deep baritone, were: "You are here to support this lady by creating positive energy and to continue to support her in the pursuit of her destiny." It was the same voice that I had heard in Virginia several years before. He turned to me and called me Isabelle and said that that was my name. I didn't understand what he meant. He talked for a while and people asked him questions. I was so nervous I asked him dumb things like, "What shall I talk about in my lecture tomorrow?" His answer was, "Tell them I exist." Which I did.

PLAYBOY: What was the group's response?

KUBLER-ROSS: I was so high they knew I was telling the truth. So then Anka––that's his name––said, "Your own special friend is ready to come and visit you now," and Salem appeared an inch in front of my knees. And I thought, “If this guy touches me I'm going to drop dead.” The second I had that thought, he disappeared and I was furious at myself. So Anka said we should take a break and when we came back, he told me that I needed this experience in order to remove the last doubts from my mind that what I already believed about life after death was true. That is why, he said, I had to have my own experiences of the moment of death. And he asked if I was willing to continue with this work, because the death-and-dying work was just a test, the real pain and hostility from the world was yet to come. He asked me three times and I said yes three times. Then Salem reappeared and he touched my sandals for a long time. He stroked my hair very gently and held my hand. Then I knew what my patients talk about when, after you come out of the tunnel, you are engulfed in total, absolute love. You feel like a baby after it has been nursed and lies in the arms of its mother. The tenderness and peace are indescribable.

PLAYBOY: When he touched you, did he feel like a real man?

KUBLER-ROSS: Yes. There is no distinction. Salem took me into the next room and told me that we, the people at that session, were chosen to be present because we had worked together in Jerusalem 2000 years ago with Christ. And that we had made a commitment to him that if there was another moral crisis, when mankind was on the edge, we would all come back and help. And Christ called me Isabelle. Salem told me this society will try anything to discredit me. They will ridicule me and mute me and render me incapacitated. And was I willing to accept this task? I said yes once again.

PLAYBOY: What other messages did Salem give you?

KUBLER-ROSS; He said that all people are guided this way––if only we knew it––and that we are protected and loved beyond any comprehension. Then he left. And the group of us sat and played guitars and sang. By then it was about two in the morning. After a few minutes, Willy appeared,

PLAYBOY: Who was Willy?

KUBLER-ROSS: The guide who sings and looks like an American country-music singer. He sang one song after another and I felt very nostalgic. God, I thought, if my parents could only have lived long enough to know this miracle. Their little black sheep, Elisabeth, getting a great gift like this. Now, my father's favorite song when I was a child was *Always,* and while I was having those melancholy thoughts, Willy stopped his song in the middle, looked at me and began to sing, 'I’ll be loving you always." Tell me, how can anybody fake that? We sang for God knows how many hours that night,

PLAYBOY: How does one materialize a guide?

KUBLER-ROSS: It takes two forms of energy. Number one, it takes an enormous amount of positive energy, more energy than to shoot a rocket to the moon. So it is not an ordinary kind of occurrence. If anybody in the group is destructive or negative, no guide can possibly materialize. It is very complicated, Second, it takes channel energy. A person––like Jay Barham—acts as the channel, and the guides take actual molecules out of him to clone a human being, in which form they appear. The bulk energy to create the guide who comes to visit comes from us, the group. It is a true cloning. And the more people there are in the group, the faster the materialization happens. Jay is the best channel I know, not the only one but the best.

Not only does he have a huge amount of positive energy but he has the ability to put himself into this trancelike state where the guides can work on him without waking him up.

PLAYBOY: When Barham is a channel, does the guide cloned from him look like him?

KUBLER-ROSS: Oh, no. Anka materializes from Jay and he is pitch-black and 7'10". You see, they can create anything they want, and they can change in one evening. One Christmas, I told Anka jokingly he should come as a Santa Claus with a beard, and he actually did. With a real beard that we all pulled on.

PLAYBOY: You have claimed that you've scientifically verified the existence of spirit guides, How?

KUBLER-ROSS: Remember in one of the first questions you asked. I told you that I'm blessed that I'm able to be in touch with them, to see and talk to them, to tape-record them. They know everything about my life.

PLAYBOY: If you heard that answer from somebody else, would you consider that scientific verification?

KUBLER-ROSS: You see, my definition of verification might be thrown out by a hundred scientists. But when something happens like my trip to Georgia, where Mario appeared, only from the waist up and massaged me and weeks later, when I saw him again, just to test the truth, I said. "What in the world happened in Georgia?" He played insulted and said, in that gruff voice, "Don't you remember? I gave you a back rub for 15 minutes." So, you see, I've had hundreds of these experiences. That's my verification.

PLAYB0Y: Whatever else it is, it's not the slightest bit scientific. Has it occurred to you that all of this stuff about spirit guides might be your way of dealing with the chronic depression that apparently affects many professionals in your field—constantly having to cope with death and suffering, families losing their loved ones, grief, tragedy, horror? You are obviously a compassionate woman and perhaps you've invented jolly tales of eternal bliss in order to manage this work you do.

KUBLER-ROSS: But, you see, I have *never* viewed death as a tragedy, nor have I been afraid to die. Death is very natural to me and it is terribly misunderstood in our society. It is a fact that nine out of ten people go into this field in order to cope with their own fears of death. But if you don't have a pool of unexpressed and repressed pain and fear, you do not get depressed or burned out. You can only get burned out if you do not have the courage and the technique to work with your own personal unfinished business and finish it. My work brings me contentment and satisfaction. It brings me happiness. I love to sit with a dying child and see the parents find peace before she dies. And see the brothers and sisters being able to talk with that child. And to listen to that child of four or five who is so wise. That nurtures me and makes me feel very good about myself.

PLAYBQY: All right, tell us about Barham. Who is he?

KUBLER-ROSS: The world thinks he is a nobody. He was a sharecropper and a mechanic and doesn't even have a high school diploma. But he has a greater gift for healing than anybody I have ever met. In all my traveling and the hundreds of talented people I have seen, I have never met anybody with more humility or a greater gift. I knew right away that he was obviously the person I should be working with, even though my husband and my so-called friends said I should be joining up with somebody of the same caliber as me, someone with fame and all the honorary degrees that I have. But all that is as useless as an old dishrag to me. I see my teaming up with the Barhams as predestined, part of our commitment before we were born. Each one of us has our own gifts-Marti is a very good teacher of psychodrama-so we each contribute what we are in a very comfortable symbiosis.

PLAYBOY: Are the Barhams involved in your Shanti Nilaya "healing center”?

KUBLER-ROSS: Yes, they are on the paid staff, and they give 99 percent of the workshops now with me. All of our money goes into Shanti Nilaya; of course. I contribute much more than they do so far. But someday Jay will be so famous that people will be happy to pay him $10.000 for a visit. Right now, I spend $50.000 a year just on the upkeep.

PLAYBOY: Does Shanti Nilaya have anything to do with the darkroom sessions and the spirit guides?

KUBLER-ROSS: Nothing at all. That took place at Jay's ranch, which is down the road.

PLAYBOY: Let's discuss the scandal that was unearthed by the press two years ago, centering on those darkroom sessions. There were several charges made by people from your group who had participated in the materializations of the spirit guides—or "entities," as you also call them. They claim three things: (I) that there are no real spirits present, only Barham masquerading as an entity; (2) that Barham, in disguise, had frequently lured the female members into sexual activities with him; and (3) that he enlisted other women members to pretend to be guides and seduce the male participants. You are not considered part of the fraudulence but a dupe of the Barhams. What do you say?

KUBLER-ROSS: I have spent more than 200 hours in the darkroom sessions, and I have had no such experience or ever seen any sex take place. This small segment of people defected because they were confronted with their own perversions, their own unnatural behavior and negativity and couldn't take it. But that is a very small group. To me all those stories—every one—are a projection, an attempt of people to deal with their own fears and guilts by projecting them on somebody else in an attempt to revenge and destroy.

PLAYBOY: A woman who was a close friend of yours went, at your invitation, to participate in a darkroom session. According to an article in *New West,* she said that her entity told her he would help her, in private, with the sexual problems she was having with her husband. Later, she tore the tape covering off the light switch, turned on the lights and found that the entity was none other than a naked Barham with a turban. Everybody shrieked and shut the lights off quickly, and there was tremendous upset over what she had done.

KUBLER-ROSS: This was a woman whose greatest ambition was to become famous with me and work with me: One day, I decided that the greatest gift I could give her was the experience of the darkroom. She was a very, very uptight woman, but that is none of my business and I have never involved myself in the study of sexuality or homosexuality. Well, she met her guide and he made her aware of some problems she had. She became very upset, because he hit the nail on the head. So she was out for revenge and wanted· to believe this was all a fraud. When she switched the light on, it could have killed the channel, Jay, who was in the next room. Or it makes him very sick with vomiting for days. That's why everybody was upset and why the entity just bent down and covered his head from the bright light. She was, of all the people present, the *only* one who supposedly saw Barham, who wasn't even in the room. She kept switching it on and somebody would switch it off. This was devastating to me. She had this glorious messiah complex that she was going to save me from this fraud, when I wanted to share with her what was the greatest gift of my life. For 50 years, I have gone my own path and certainly don't need a jerk like her with all her own hang-ups to tell me what to do.

PLAYBOY: You were there during that incident?

KUBLER-ROSS: Yes, and I have the whole thing on tape. After she was asked to leave, every person in the room shared the experience. Then Mario came and dealt with our anguish and disappointment.

PLAYBOY: We'd like to hear that tape.

KUBLER-ROSS: No. I want to keep those things for my autobiography. If I give everything away to you now, I might as well forget writing my book. After that incident, by the way, she wrote long letters to my husband. And that is when he started to turn away and thought I was hooked on some fraudulent group. She is really responsible for my divorce.

PLAYBOY: Your claim that you're saving your tapes for a book doesn't help your credibility, but let's go on. Another serious charge was brought to the San Diego D.A.'s office, involving a ten-year-old girl who said

an entity led her into a private room and sexually molested her. What about that?

KUBLER-ROSS*: [smiling]* Oh, that I love to talk about, Every Christmas, Mario comes and allows the people to bring their children. If you had spent an hour with Mario and those children, you would never forget it as long as you live. This little girl sat next to me, a very old wise soul, and she held my hand during the whole evening. She whispered to me, "I hope my guide comes for a few minutes," and the guide came and stood for a long time silently. They are not allowed to touch you and you are not allowed to touch them without permission. That is one of the universal laws. She said, "Is that you?" and called him by name, which I can't remember. He tapped her on the head, which means yes. She asked him if she could go visit with him in the little private back room, and he put his arms out to her and they left. About ten minutes later, she came back and pressed my hand. She was the happiest little girl, totally content.

PLAYBOY: Where did the story of sexual molesting come from?

KUBLER-ROSS: Months later, when the group defected and tried to destroy us, the mother thought that would be the one way to get even with us or with Jay. What a humdinger accusation! What she doesn't know is that I have everything on tape, everything the child said to me before and after.

PLAYBOY: Would you let us hear *that* tape?

KUBLER-ROSS: I have to find those things. They are all in the safe. Not now, but when I get to those things.

PLAYBOY: To the degree that your credibility has been severely damaged by this scandal, it might be a good idea—

KUBLER-ROSS: Please don't try to establish my credibility. Because the truth will prevail whether we talk for another 100 hours or not and whether PLAYBOY readers believe me or not.

PLAYBOY: OK, then. If you don't care, that's up to you. Have you ever seen an entity that looked like Barham?

KUBLER-ROSS: No. Never. Some had features of Jay, but looked like Jay, no.

PLAYBOY: What about the reports by women who were asked by Barham to pretend that they were spirit guides and have sex with men participants? Specifically, the woman who swore that she was pretending —at Barham's command—to be an entity for your dying patient Louise?

KUBLER-ROSS: It's not true. I was there, She really *was* the channel. But when you are in a trance, you can dream of anything and really experience those things. I don't think she is lying deliberately; I don't want to believe that. I think all those women who made that silly claim were frightened that they had gotten involved in something that they had absolutely no control over. And to alleviate their guilt, they confessed to something that their minds had created. You see, say I would be a female channel: When I am in my trance, I have no idea what the guides that were created out of my tissue do in the other room. That is a horrendous responsibility, and if you have any fear that something goes on that is fishy or dirty, you have to justify this burden of responsibility. I can very well understand that someone who has a lot of his own unfinished business would create a story like that, that they were pretending to be guides.

PLAYBOY: Do you mean to say that *all* the stories of sex between the entities and the participants are untrue?

KUBLER-ROSS: I don't have the slightest idea if anybody had sex, if you mean intercourse. I am sure the guides worked with people on those problems.

PLAYBOY: You never saw it?

KUBLER-ROSS: [Agitated] Are you kidding? No, I never saw that!

PLAYBOY: Why do you say it like that—so shocked?

KUBLER-ROSS: Do you actually believe that the guide would have intercourse with somebody? I mean, that is going a bit too far. It is so inconceivable. But then, I am coming from a prudish background.

PLAYBOY: Have you ever had sex with an entity?

KUBLER-ROSS: No! As I told you before, I have no doubts that they deal with sexual hang-ups. In what way they do that, whether they talk about it or make the person aware of where his frigidity or uptightness comes from to help him, I don't know. I just know they will help you with anything that you need. My life is totally work-oriented, so I get all the help I need for my work. And nobody witnesses the private visit of another person.

PLAYBOY: 'Why did the whole group of avid followers defect and turn against you if those things weren't really happening?

KUBLER-ROSS: It was a very small group of people who went totally the other way; maybe 20 out of 200 became really destructive. A much bigger group just stayed away and don't want to be dragged into the negativity. But they write us beautiful letters of how much growth there was. They're just—I want to say chicken; they kind of sit and wait and see_

PLAYBOY: But why defect at all?

KUBLER-ROSS: The only reason people defect and write dirty sex stories is because they get very close to their own filth and hang-ups. I must say in all fairness, if you have any weak spots in you, the guides put you through hell. You have to be very strong to take it; they have no mercy. You see, they are very, very hard on you to do your own growth work. And, by the way, they didn't really turn against me, they tried to destroy Jay Barham.

PLAYBOY: Are you saying that the sole explanation for all those stories, and all the people who have given scalding statements to the press about the shenanigans in the darkroom is that they were too frightened by the confrontation of their own hang-ups? Is that what you're claiming?

KUBLER-ROSS: Yes. You see, you cannot be offended if you have no fear or guilt. But when things get too close to the truth and you are very insulted about this confrontation, the easiest way is to destroy the people who make you aware of that. Many of them actually believed it was a fraud, because then they don't have to buy it. But everything is based on fear.

PLAYBOY: What if the stories are true? What would that mean to you?

KUBLER-ROSS: You would have to come and explain to me how Mario can materialize to me from the waist up, then I will buy that this is not all a reality.

PLAYBOY: What if both are true? That you have spirit guides who have appeared to you and that Barham is a charlatan who set this all up for his own venal purposes?

KUBLER-ROSS: *That* is totally impossible. The entities can never materialize if there is negativity. And if people were being misused sexually, no Mario or Anka could ever materialize. It is against the universal laws. The only possibility is that none of this exists and our minds are being manipulated by a universal mind. OK? Say *that* was a fact. The growth has been so positive for so many people, the compassion is so beyond human understanding, I would be grateful if Jay was such a genius to create such love and compassion.

PLAVBOY: Do you have any tinge of fear that you might be wrong? That Barham might be a charlatan?

KUBLER-ROSS: No. I have gone through many struggles and checked out every experience I have had a thousand times. But even if that were so, I would say I have no regrets for the past three years. Because what I have learned outweighs all the agony and accusations. I can tell you honestly I would do it all over again.

PLAYBOY: Could you have saved your marriage if you had been willing to end your relationship with the Barhams?

KUBLER-ROSS: Oh, instantly. But I wouldn't. I still have so much pain about this. I still don't understand if you follow what needs to be done, why the price is so high. I am very much of a mother hen; I love to feed and cook and take care of people, and this is a horrendous adjustment for me.

PLAYBOY: It was reported that you said if you found out that Barham were a phony, you would have to commit suicide.

KUBLER-ROSS: It was also reported that I have cancer and that I am psychotic. It's possible that I said that about suicide in one of my angry moments, but I really have no recollection.

PLAYBOY: Do you understand how truly puzzling this is? You have done significant work, made a contribution to science. Yet this incomprehensible saga of spirit guides suggests one of four possibilities: First, that everything you are saying is true and the rest of us need to expand our minds to embrace it all; second, that you have gone crazy; third, that you yourself are a fraud; and fourth—the thing that most of the people who know you believe—that you have been taken in by this strange team of charlatans who are out to soak you. Did we leave out any possibilities?

KUBLER-ROSS: There are 4,000,000 possibilities, but there is a very simple way of verifying whether Jay is phony-baloney.

PLAYBOY: What way is that?

KUBLER-ROSS: Look at the patient we had here, as my houseguest for three months. She was a broken woman when she came. She had had epileptic seizures for nine years. Her husband was dead, her child taken away because she couldn't care for it; she never slept for more than a half hour at a time. For nine years, she had a catastrophic existence, running from doctors to hospitals to institutions for more tests. For three months. Jay worked with her, together with a physician and my support. Through psychic energy alone, we sealed off her brain lesions and made an orifice to discharge the energy from the lesions, attached it to the carbon dioxide in the blood vessels, so that she could exhale it through her respiration. She is working now full time as a nurse and lives a normal life. You see, Jay is the healer and I am the catalyst for his work.

PLAYBOY: So you say that if he is capable of performing miraculous healings, he couldn't be capable of those other charges?

KUBLER-ROSS: Of course. This man helps more people than you can ever imagine. A bad person who spends his energy on fraud would never be able to do such good work. If you see the rest of the workshops that we do together, you could never question his motivations. I know that our work is good and that is all I need to know.

PLAYBOY: That may not be enough for most people—even those who wish you well. What are your emotional outlets? What do you do to free yourself of all the bitterness you talk about?

KUBLER-ROSS: When I am really at the point of despair, I usually call on Mario and cry for a couple of hours or bitch or just share all the unfairness. Or I work in my garden—two acres of land. If I am in the mountains, I like to hike and climb.

PLAYBOY: How about friends?

KUBLER-ROSS: I am alone now. I do not share my private pains with many people. That is true of only the last couple of years, because I was so disappointed in the ones I counted on the most, people whom I loved unconditionally who proved that they loved me, *but* ... or *if* I would sever my communications with those people. They said I'd be better off to just forget my work now and continue on as I did ten years ago. That to me is not a friend. To put it bluntly, I cannot even have an affair with anybody. No 'matter how much I would need that.

PLAYBOY: Why not?

KUBLER-ROSS: Because I would never know if a magazine would come six months later and offer that guy $50,000 for a dirty story and if he was angry with me at the time, he would tell them about my behavior. I

could never do that. That would really destroy my work. Anything I say or do, how I dress or how much I smoke, a few months later, it is some where in a magazine, usually distorted.

It's very unfair. But it is also very necessary and that is why I can take it. With all the negative publicity, there are 1,000,000 people now who know of Shanti Nilaya who didn't before. Something in the stories—even the distorted ones —touches a lot of them and they connect with us, writing pleas for help. So it is also a degree of free publicity. But, as I told you, when all this negativity in the world doesn't need to exist anymore, then my whole work will be unnecessary and finished.

PLAYBOY: Do you think you will accomplish your task before you die?

KUBLER-ROSS: Yes. Absolutely.

PLAYBOY: And you won't die before that happens? Until you do what you were put here to do?

KUBLER-ROSS: That's right. I am very clear about that.

PLAYBOY: Do you look forward to your own death?

KUBLER-ROSS: Oh, yes. Then I will have the knowledge that I've finished my job and I can retire.

PLAYBOY: By retire do you actually mean die?

KUBLER-ROSS: Yes. I will not retire unless I die. Then I will finally be taken care of and pampered.